

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A process for the continuous manufacture of an austenitic stainless steel strip having a dull surface appearance with a brightness of less than 30 and an arithmetic mean roughness Ra of greater than  $0.12 \mu\text{m}$ , of the annealed/pickled type, the process comprising:

- subjecting a cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip to a heat treatment in a bright annealing furnace inside which a flushing gas chosen from inert or reducing gases and having a dew point above  $[-15^\circ\text{C}]$  -10°C circulates, said flushing gas comprising less than 1% oxygen by volume and less than 1% air by volume, said heat treatment comprising a heating phase at a heating rate V1, a soak phase at a temperature T for a soak time M, followed by a cooling phase at a cooling rate V2, in order to obtain a strip covered with an oxide layer; and
- pickling the strip covered with an oxide layer using an acid pickling solution capable of completely removing said oxide layer according to its thickness and its nature.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 1, wherein the dew point of said flushing gas is ~~between~~ from above -10 [[and]] to 30°C.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim [[2]] 1, wherein the dew point of said flushing gas is between -5 and 10°C.

**Claim 4 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein said flushing gas comprises at least one gas selected from the group consisting of argon, hydrogen, and nitrogen.

**Claim 5 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein the heat treatment of the cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip is carried out at a rate V1 of greater than 10°C/s, a soak temperature T between 1050 and 1150°C, and a soak time M between 1 s and 120 s, and in the cooling phase said strip is cooled at a rate V2 of greater than 10°C/s down to a temperature of 200°C or below.

**Claim 6 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein the heat treatment of the cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip is carried out using an induction heating device.

**Claim 7 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein the heat treatment of the cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip is carried out using a resistance heating device.

**Claim 8 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein the acid pickling solution is an aqueous solution comprising at least one acid selected from the group consisting of nitric acid, hydrofluoric acid and sulfuric acid.

**Claim 9 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 8, wherein the aqueous solution comprises hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid, or

the aqueous solution comprises hydrofluoric acid and further comprises ferric ions  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$ .

**Claim 10 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 9, wherein the aqueous solution comprises 10 to 80 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 60 to 140 g/l nitric acid.

**Claim 11 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 10, wherein the aqueous solution comprises 30 to 50 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 80 to 120 g/l nitric acid.

**Claim 12 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 9, wherein the aqueous solution comprises 5 to 100 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 1 to 150 g/l ferric ions.

**Claim 13 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 12, wherein the aqueous solution comprises 30 to 80 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 30 to 50 g/l ferric ions.

**Claim 14 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein in the pickling the strip covered with an oxide layer is sprayed with the acid pickling solution.

**Claim 15 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein in the pickling the strip covered with an oxide layer is immersed in a pickling bath containing the acid pickling solution.

**Claim 16 (Previously Presented):** The process according to Claim 1, wherein the temperature of the acid pickling solution is between 20 and 100°C.

Claim 17 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 16, wherein the temperature of the acid pickling solution is between 50 and 80°C.

Claim 18 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 1, wherein the time during which the strip is in contact with the acid pickling solution is between 10 s and 2 min.

Claim 19 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 1, wherein in the pickling the oxide layer is completely removed from the strip covered with an oxide layer.